

**IOWA ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT  
ADMINISTRATOR'S GUIDE  
Revised July 16, 2009**

This guide provides information on Iowa's Alternate Assessment for building administrators. A question-and-answer format is used to summarize information. While the document was designed with building administrators in mind, teachers, central office personnel, and parents might also find some of the information relevant. Steve Maurer, Low-Incidence Disability and Alternate Assessment Consultant, is the alternate assessment lead. He can be reached at [steve.maurer@iowa.gov](mailto:steve.maurer@iowa.gov) or at 515-281-3576.

1. **What is an alternate assessment?** An alternate assessment is an assessment designed for a small number of students with disabilities who are unable to participate in the regular grade level state assessment (ITBS/ITED) even with appropriate accommodations.
2. **Why must Iowa have an alternate assessment?** *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* requires that all students, even those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, have access to the general education curriculum. For accountability purposes, all students in grades 3-8 and at a high school grade must be assessed on performance against grade level state content standards. In addition, the *Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA)* also requires students with disabilities to have access to the general education curriculum and participate in the statewide assessment system. Alternate assessment allows students who cannot participate in the general assessment, to be assessed more equitably given their current performance.
3. **Who should participate in the Iowa Alternate Assessment?** Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The IEP team, which includes parents, uses state participation guidelines (found on the Department IAA Website) to determine eligibility for alternate assessment. Students in grades 3-8 and 11 participate in the reading and mathematics alternate assessment and students in grades 5, 8, and 11 participate in the science alternate assessment. Students in Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, 9, 10, or 12 do not need to be assessed *unless* the district gives a reading, mathematics, and/or science assessment to all students in those particular grades. In that case, rating scales developed for the grade nearest to the student's grade *could* be administered as an assessment, but there are no performance levels for these grades. Results at Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, 9, 10, or 12, count for Chapter 72 reporting, but results do not need to be sent to the Iowa Department of Education for purposes of Adequate Yearly Progress determination.
4. **Can parents refuse to have their child included in the alternate assessment?** No. All students must be assessed under *NCLB*. Students with IEPs are assessed through either general or alternate assessments as determined by the IEP team. If

the local school district has a policy allowing parents to request the district to not test students, this policy should extend to parents of children with disabilities. Parents of enrolled students need to know that if their child does not take the alternate assessment, they are counted as exclusions under *NCLB*, which could eventually cause problems for districts in making adequate yearly progress under *NCLB*.

5. **When does the alternate assessment need to be administered?** The testing period is from the start of the school year to March 31<sup>st</sup>.
6. **What is the role of building administrators in the Iowa Alternate Assessment process?**
  - Throughout the school year, review the alternate assessment rating scales, student performance ratings, and supporting evidence through conversations with teachers
  - Encourage district instructional technology personnel to work with teachers to access assistive technology on the district server
  - Ensure teachers understand the process and feel supported
  - Provide release time for teachers of students in the alternate assessment to attend training and to work with general education content teachers in adapting general education curriculum content for their students
  - Contact the Department for “Official Answers” to your questions
7. **What is the Building Administrator’s Assurance Process?** This process provides (a) assurance that all rating scale items that have been rated have supporting evidence, and (b) means for administrators to be more involved in the alternate assessment process so that teachers have more access to general educators and content experts. The Assurance Process documents the conversations between teachers and administrators. Administrators should use The Assurance Checklist as a guide for these conversations. This checklist can be found on the Department IAA Website.
8. **Under what conditions are students counted as “exclusions?”**
  - a) If the Department receives a rating scale but no assurance form, the Department will contact the teacher and building administrator. If no assurance form is received, the child is counted as exclusion for participation and performance.
  - b) If the Department receives an assurance form but no rating scale, the teacher and administrator will be contacted. If the teacher does not have evidence that was gathered anytime during September 2009 through March 2010, and the teacher begins his or her evidence collection after notification by the department that a rating scale was expected, the child is an exclusion and the building administrator or district designee must file a new assurance form and attest that the process was

not adhered to and that the child is an exclusion. If there are data, then the teacher has one week after notification to enter data, after which the child will be an exclusion.

c) If the Department receives neither an assurance form nor a rating scale for a student from which student demographic data were entered in fall of 2009, the Department will prompt the teacher for data or explanation of why the data will not be forthcoming (moved, deceased, staffed into general assessment). Students without explanations and for whom Iowa Testing Program data are not found in Project EASIER, will be counted as exclusions for participation and performance.

9. **What is the 1% Cap on the Iowa alternate Assessment?** NCLB does not limit the percent of students eligible to participate in alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards, but NCLB limits the percentage of students who can be counted as proficient on this assessment (for adequate yearly progress (AYP) determinations) to 1% of a district's general student population. The cap applies to district-level data; there is no limit at the building level. If a district is over the 1% limit, the Department will contact the district and send it a 1% exemption request form.
10. **What is the Iowa Alternate Assessment process?** The purpose of the Iowa Alternate Assessment (IAA) is to assess the educational performance of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in reading, mathematics, and science. The process consists of evidenced-based rating scales, which focus on student knowledge and skills in reading, mathematics, and science. The process requires teachers to generate classroom-based student evidence. These rating scale items are aligned to the Iowa Core Content Standards and Benchmarks.
11. **Why is Iowa's alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards?** The IAA measures student progress on Iowa's Core Content Standards and Benchmarks at a reduced breadth, depth, and complexity, and is judged against a different definition of proficiency than the ITBS/ITED. Student's participation and performance will most likely be supported by assistive technology, adaptations, and prompting and cueing strategies.
12. **What are Content Standards and Benchmarks?** Content Standards and Benchmarks define what students should know and be able to do. For NCLB purposes, the Iowa Core Content Standards and Benchmarks describe what students should be doing in grades 3-8 and 11, in reading, mathematics, and science.
13. **What are Achievement Standards?** Achievement Standards have 3 components: performance levels, performance descriptors, and cut scores.
  - **What are Performance Levels?** Performance Levels label each level of achievement. In Iowa, we have three performance levels: Basic, Proficient, and Advanced.

- **What are Performance Descriptors?** Performance Descriptors built by consensus, are written to reflect high expectations of what children know and are able to do both within a grade level and between grades.
- **What are Cut Scores?** Numerical scores that separate the different levels of performance.

14. **What is a rating scale?** These scales in reading, mathematics, and science are a list of essential skills and knowledge for each grade and content area tested. Over the course of several months, a teacher gathers information that results in a rating of the student's achievement of these skills and knowledge. These scores are based on alternate achievement standards which NCLB allows states to develop to determine proficiency of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

**For further information about the IAA process, access this weblink:**

**[http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=461&Itemid=1576](http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=461&Itemid=1576)**